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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Letter dated 30 June 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the texts in English and French of the Geneva Declaration for Rural Women (see annex), adopted at the Summit on the economic advancement of rural women, which was held at Geneva on 25 and 26 February 1992.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex published as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 79 of the preliminary list, and of the substantive session of 1992 of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 12.

(Signed) Paul NOTERDAEME
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of
Belgium to the United Nations

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ANNEX

The Geneva Declaration for Rural Women,
adopted at the Summit on the economic advancement of rural women
(Geneva, 25 and 26 February 1992)

PREAMBLE

*1. We, the wives of Heads of State or Government from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania, have gathered here to express our solidarity with the rural women of the world. By expressing our solidarity, we are determined to raise the awareness of decision-makers, at the national, regional and international levels, of the condition of rural women. We declare our commitment to their social and economic advancement and, thereby, to the enhancement of the well-being of the rural family and to equitable, sustainable development.*

*2. We recognize the importance and value of rural women's contribution to democracy and socio-economic development. We also recognise that in many developing countries, women constitute more than 50% of the rural population and up to 50%-70% of the agricultural labour force. Without their effective participation neither democracy nor development can be sustained. It is therefore necessary that rural women's multiple contributions to the family, to democracy and to development be acknowledged and properly valued. The undervaluing of rural women's contribution to development and their under-representation in decision-making have increased their marginalization.*

*3. We believe that the current global movement towards democracy will help to change social and political attitudes towards women and their access to and control over resources, while creating conditions under which rural women themselves will be more aware of their own self-image and rights. Therefore, we declare our resolve to play a decisive role in the democratization of our political systems, from grassroots to national level.*

*4. Rural women the world over are an integral and vital force in the development processes that are the key to socio-economic progress. Rural women include farmers, wage workers, petty traders, artisans, industrial home workers, micro-producers and domestic servants. They form the backbone of the agricultural labour force across much of the developing world and produce 35%-45% of Gross Domestic Product and well over 50% of the developing world's food. Yet, over half a billion rural women are poor and lack access to resources and markets. In fact, the number is estimated to have increased by 50% over the past 20 years and today they outnumber poor men.*

*5. Among the factors that have contributed to the intensification of poverty over the last decade are: on-going economic crises in the developing world due to deteriorating terms of trade, the debt crisis, inefficient allocation of government expenditures, capital flight, the social costs of adjustment, political instability, recession in the developed world, environmental degradation and demographic pressure. Women's poverty has also been aggravated for a variety of reasons, among which are changes in*

*household and family structures leading to a growing number of female-headed households and to a weakening of household survival strategies. In many developing countries today, more than one-third of rural households are headed by a female.*

*6. Poverty intensifies the constraints under which women struggle to survive and carry out their responsibility to provide family and national food security.*

*7. The lack of support for women's economic activities, and particularly for those of the poorest, is not simply a women's issue. It is a general development problem which must be addressed, because gender equality, poverty reduction and development are inextricably linked.*

*8. Up to 90% of rural women in developing countries rely on the land for their livelihood. They are the main providers of water and fuelwood and are responsible for the health of their families. Rural women are vulnerable to environmental degradation and the diminution of natural resources, and they cannot always rely on the sustained use of resources when these are under pressure. It is important to consider, as a priority, training strategies for rural women on alternative technologies for domestic fuels. Furthermore, recognizing that rural women are central to sustaining the resource base and that they are often at the forefront of popular movements to protect the environment, development interventions must draw upon their traditional knowledge and experience of environmental conservation.*

*9. Building on the Mexico and the Copenhagen Declarations, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development of African Women, and in view of the forthcoming 1995 Fourth United Nations Conference on Women, we women around the world are determined to arouse public opinion and mobilize all necessary political will and resources in order to transform the status and quality of life of rural women and their families.*

*10. In this context, we take note of the plans of action and the specific guidelines developed by a number of United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations for the advancement of rural women in accordance with their own mandates.*

*11. Rural women's social and economic advancement has to be promoted within the framework of national plans for social and economic development. In this process close cooperation and partnership between men and women is essential. This cooperation must be strengthened at all levels of development intervention by making public opinion and policy-makers and implementers aware of the importance of the multiple roles of women.*

## ● OBJECTIVES ●

12. In their operational strategies and action programmes, many national governments, development organizations and international financial institutions address the problem of women in general, without specifically focusing on rural women. We urge that future strategies and actions have as their primary focus the condition of rural women, especially the poorest. The objectives of such efforts should be to:

(i) Mobilize political will at the national and international levels in order to target rural women as participants and direct beneficiaries of all development policies, programmes and projects.

(ii) Ensure that the economic needs and well-being of rural women are taken account of in all sectoral policies and programmes by bringing into sharp focus the role of women in household, productive and community work, in the design of development interventions and the adequate allocation of resources.

(iii) Improve rural women's access to resources through alternative policy instruments that ensure more equitable gender-based distribution of land, labour, capital, technology, social services and infrastructure.

(iv) Launch initiatives essential for raising the productive capacities of both men and women, with special attention to rural women from disadvantaged households, female-headed households, young rural women, disabled women, and migrant and displaced women.

(v) Promote national and household food security by supporting the critical role of women in food production and income generation.

(vi) Alleviate women's heavy workload, which often involves long hours spent daily gathering fuel, collecting water, producing and preparing food, maintaining their homes, nurturing their children and, in addition, earning incomes that are essential to the survival of their families.

(vii) Improve the health and nutritional status of mothers and their children and thereby the quality of life of the family.

(viii) Reorient the information, communication and educational systems so that they meet the specific needs of rural women while preserving and promoting their cultural identity.

(ix) Optimize the role of rural women as agents of change, and create conditions for their social, political and economic empowerment.

(x) Create opportunities for rural women to assume leadership positions in the decision-making process.

(xi) Promote, strengthen and disseminate rural women's organizations in order to establish effective channels for their access to decision-making bodies at all levels.

(xii) Develop a constructive partnership between men and women in rural areas, based on social mobilization and an enhanced understanding of women's multiple roles and economic needs.

## ● STRATEGIES ●

13. In order to achieve measurable progress in the economic advancement of rural women and improve the welfare of rural families around the world, with particular focus on the poorest, we define and recommend the following strategies, recognizing that full political commitment is a precondition for their successful implementation:

(i) Governments, national institutions, non-governmental organizations, private sector agencies, United Nations agencies and other donor agencies should allocate greater resources to promote the economic and social advancement of rural women.

(ii) Rural women should be invited to participate in the formulation of development plans and policies which affect their well-being. Project design teams should include representatives of rural women to ensure that they benefit equitably from development.

(iii) New legislation and institutional procedures should be introduced and/or the existing ones reformed in order to ensure that rural women have equitable and sustainable access to productive resources. Similar measures should be taken to ensure that women have equity in inheritance, marriage, divorce and child custody Also, legal and administrative measures should be taken to protect rural women from exploitation in the labour, capital and product markets. They must be assured of equal pay for equal work. | with due regard for different legal systems.

(iv) Mechanisms must be established, with adequate resource support, to provide gender-analysis training to policy-makers, development practitioners and field workers and to collect and analyse local, national, and regional data. These will assist policy-makers and project designers in assessing the socio-economic condition of rural women so that they can target development interventions at the disadvantaged groups and design indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of projects. This action is recommended in view of the fact that data reflecting the economic and social significance of rural women's work, disaggregated by gender and income levels, are scarce. Even where they exist, they rarely appear in the government statistics used to formulate policies and develop programmes, largely because the economic value of much of women's work is not properly measured.

(v) Similar mechanisms should be in place to make information available to rural women on a wide range of subjects relevant to their needs and constraints. All rural women must have secure access to information in areas that they consider of most importance, and they should be made aware of their rights as well as of the resources, technology,

production, social services, market opportunities and credit available to them. Women should also be given access to training in communication techniques so that they can produce and circulate their own information materials as needed. The mass media such as newspapers, radio, television and films should have special space and time allocated for programmes for rural women in which they would not only be the focus but could also express their views.

(vi) Existing land legislation should be reviewed so that rural women are not discriminated against in gaining access to land. Institutions should be set up to promote a more equitable distribution of land, and to ensure the security of women's access to land of good quality. Women should be considered as direct beneficiaries of agrarian reform or settlement programmes and land property titles should be registered under the name of women tenants as well as men. Mechanisms should also be in place to reduce women's vulnerability to loss of land in cases of divorce, separation and widowhood. Support should be mobilized to protect individual and communal landholdings, and natural resources from environmental damage.

(vii) Policy and resource support should be provided to strengthen programmes and projects which raise rural women's non-agricultural self-employment and improve their access to micro-enterprises. A network of rural women's enterprises should be established to facilitate entry into large-scale outlets and marketing organizations.

(viii) Rural women's access to credit and financial services should be improved, on the basis of gender equality, by encouraging financial institutions to create new procedures for reaching rural beneficiaries and promoting community groups that will provide a local structure for improving rural women's access to information, training and guarantees, so that credit can be readily made available to them.

(ix) National, regional and international research institutions should reorient their programmes to address the problems of rural women, particularly in areas of technology for alternative energy sources and improved productivity and time-saving for women, keeping in view the requirements of health and safety. Rural women should also have full access to modern institutions and technology. Priority should be given to infrastructure development to improve women's access to water, fuel, and health, education and extension services.

(x) Rural women have extensive knowledge of indigenous food crops, plants, animals, farming methods and ecosystems. Therefore, they should be involved in the discussions about what technologies and other resources they need. National extension systems should be reoriented in order to disseminate appropriate technologies for women. To make extension services more effective, the curriculum for extension workers should include gender sensitization. The number of women extension workers should be increased and local women trained as extension workers. The language of extension should be accessible to rural women. Strong links should be established between researchers, women farmers and extension workers.

(xi) Facilities for women's education and functional literacy should be strengthened, and access to these made easier for rural women. They should be included in training programmes, in the use of appropriate agricultural techniques and in natural resource management. Women should get priority in the training of trainers.

(xii) Conditions should be created to ensure that rural girls and young women receive at least primary and secondary education, health and vocational training and support to enhance the quality of their lives.

(xiii) Rural women, especially those from disadvantaged households, must be included in training programmes and non-formal education of all types, and given preferential access to fellowships and scholarships.

(xiv) Parents and community leaders should be sensitized and child marriages discouraged, so that boys and girls are given equal opportunity in education and training.

(xv) Adequate resources should be allocated to maintain and improve social services in the areas of education, health, family planning, nutrition and recreation. These are essential to the well-being of rural families and complementary to rural men's and women's productive capacity.

## ● IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP ●

14. The objectives of this Declaration can be realized only if the strategies outlined are implemented and followed up. To this end:

(i) We welcome the fact that many United Nations agencies have established policies and guidelines concerning their approach to the needs of rural women. We urge that such guidelines be revised, as appropriate, in recognition of the concerns which we have expressed in this Declaration.

(ii) We request all governments to do their utmost to formulate specific plans of action for the advancement of rural women outlining policies, projects and programmes. These plans of action should include a detailed assessment of the resources required and specify institutional responsibilities for mobilizing resources, implementing programmes, and monitoring and evaluation.

(iii) We urge the United Nations Regional Economic Commissions to aid national governments in mobilizing resources for financial and technical assistance, to facilitate the exchange of country/project experiences and to establish a regional apparatus for monitoring the progress of implementation of this Declaration.

(iv) We urge multilateral and bilateral funding agencies and non-governmental organizations substantially to increase their allocation of resources to projects and programmes which fully take into account the specific and individual needs of women, especially in rural areas. In addition, all financing and technical assistance agencies are urged to ensure that the projects they support become increasingly sensitive to issues of poverty and gender. We also urge them to ensure that project monitoring systems maintain gender- and income-specific data on targets and achievements. All food agencies, international financial institutions and other interested inter-governmental bodies should seek to reinforce existing mechanisms so as to improve coordination of their activities to implement the recommendations of this Declaration.

(v) We appeal to all governments that have already signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other United Nations resolutions pertaining to rural women to implement them fully, and urge governments which have not done so to ratify the Convention.

(vi) We appeal to all governments and regional and international organizations to report to the 1995 Fourth United Nations Conference on Women on quantifiable progress in implementing policies and

programmes with significant positive impact on the economic and social well-being of rural women and their families.

(vii) We recognize that within the context of international cooperation (i.e., North-South and South-South relations) the rural women of our countries represent a potent political force. This force can be utilized to strengthen and consolidate international cooperation in all its forms. We regard the initiative of this Summit as a step towards the building of bridges between rural women across continents - making a contribution to a new form of international cooperation - which will have a significant impact on global development, peace and harmony. We call on the international community to support this initiative, as provided for in Resolution E/1991/64, dated 26 July 1991, of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), which reflects the spirit and content of this Declaration in policies and programmes at all levels.

(viii) We declare that we remain fully committed to the realization of the aspirations of rural women as reflected in this Declaration. We will continue to work together in the coming years to mobilize political and financial resources and to establish enduring procedures globally, regionally and nationally to monitor the implementation of the Declaration.

(ix) Finally, we hereby resolve to establish at the global level a committee of representatives of the wives of Heads of State or Government with three members from each continent. This group will meet biennially to review the progress of implementation and to support national and regional initiatives for the advancement of rural women.

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